

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 4—Repeal of Musky and Bass Regulations

Chair Hraychuck, Vice-Chair Milroy, Members of the Assembly Fish and Wildlife Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation in support of Assembly Bill 4 repealing sections 29.426 and 29.428 of the statutes relating to the bass and muskellunge seasons. The Federation is comprised of 161 hunting, fishing, trapping and forestry related groups located throughout the State of Wisconsin.

The Wildlife Federation supports the repeal of these two provisions as much because of the process used in their adoption as the substance of the provisions being repealed. This state has a long and strong tradition of public involvement of sportsmen and women in the development of hunting and fishing regulations. For the last seventy-five years the state has used the Wisconsin Conservation Congress process to allow hunters, anglers and trappers throughout the state the opportunity to comment and vote on hunting, fishing and trapping regulations. While the sportsmen and women's opinion at the hearings is advisory to the Natural Resources Board and the Legislature, the public hearing process provides important opportunities to test the wisdom of proposed regulations by means of those that will be called upon to live by them.

That public process did not occur in this case. Musky anglers were not happy with the change in their season and scientific research ultimately showed that the barbless hook requirement for the bass catch and release season did not affect mortality. If the public process had been followed, this information would have been available prior to the regulations becoming law.

At last Spring's Conservation Congress hearings, sportsmen and women overwhelmingly supported the return to the former muskellunge and bass regulations. The voice vote at the Conservation Congress statewide meeting was deafening.

The Wildlife Federation greatly appreciates the work of the cosponsors of this bill and the early scheduling of this hearing by Chair Hraychuck. Please pass it into law as soon as possible and remove any confusion for sports anglers. Thank you again for this opportunity.

Submitted by:
George Meyer
Executive Director

February 18, 2009



State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Department of Natural Resources testimony on SB-48 and AB-4, related to catch-and-release musky fishing and use of barbless hooks for musky and bass

Related to use of barbless hooks, published scientific studies have concluded that use of barbless hooks does not reduce hooking mortality in trout, and in 2009 the Department is proposing a rule which would eliminate the requirement that anglers use barbless hooks for trout during the early, catch-and-release trout season. Trout are generally considered more sensitive to injuries than muskellunge or bass, and I know of no barbless hook requirements for muskellunge or bass in place in the United States.

In April, 2008, the Department held public hearings on proposed changes to Administrative Code which were written to reflect language in 2007 Wisconsin Act 20 regarding implementation of a catch-and-release fishing season for muskellunge in waters north of US Highway 10, and requirements that anglers use barbless hooks when fishing for muskellunge or bass during a catch-and-release season for either of those fishes. Hearings were held in every county of the state, and several options designed to fulfill the intent of Wisconsin Act 20 were presented to hearing attendees. These following options were presented, none of which received favorable public feedback:

- Do you favor moving the opening day for the regular musky season in waters north of US Highway 10 to the first Saturday in May? The current closed season (First Saturday in May through the Friday preceding Memorial Day) for musky would be eliminated. (3232 opposed, 1801 favored; 57 counties opposed, 14 counties favored (Calumet, Oconto, Shawano, Waupaca, Douglas, Price, Dodge, Lafayette, Sauk, Walworth, Buffalo, Pepin, Trempealeau, Vernon), 1 tied)
- If not, do you favor creating a catch-and-release season for muskellunge in waters north of US Highway 10, during which musky anglers would be restricted to using artificial lures with barbless hooks, beginning the first Saturday in May and ending on the day immediately preceding the regular musky season opening day, which is currently the Saturday preceding Memorial Day? (1367 opposed, 1202 favored; 68 counties opposed, 3 favored (Green Lake, Buffalo, Trempealeau), 1 tied)
- Do you favor eliminating the northern zone early bass catch-and-release season by moving the opening day in that zone to the first Saturday in May? (2909 opposed, 1891 favored; 51 counties opposed, 20 favored (Marinette, Outagamie, Shawano, Ashland, Barron, Iron, Polk, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, Jefferson, Lafayette, Kenosha, Walworth, Adams, Buffalo, Chippewa, Pepin, Trempealeau, Vernon), 1 tied)
- Do you favor eliminating the northern zone early bass catch-and-release season and having the regular bass season open the third Saturday in June? (3068 opposed, 1587 favored; 62 counties opposed, 7 favored (Columbia, Crawford, Green Lake, Lafayette, Menominee, Taylor, Washington), 3 tied)
- Do you favor the current season structure, with a catch-and-release season beginning the first Saturday in May and ending on the day before the third Saturday in June, and the regular bass season beginning the third Saturday in June? Bass anglers would be restricted to using artificial lures with barbless hooks during the catch-and-release season. (2849 opposed, 1813 favored; 54 counties opposed, 16 favored (Door, Green lake, Outagamie, Waupaca, Waushara, Bayfield, Douglas, Columbia, Iowa, Jefferson, Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, LaCrosse, Pierce, Trempealeau), 2 tied)



ANN HRAYCHUCK
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

February 18, 2009

**Testimony of Rep. Ann Hraychuck
Before the Assembly Committee on Fish and Wildlife
Regarding Assembly Bill 4**

Good morning, Chairman Milroy and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with information about Assembly Bill 4.

A new early musky catch-and-release season was created when the state budget was signed into law in October 2007. In addition, the requirement of barbless hooks was included for musky and bass catch-and-release seasons. Assembly Bill 4 repeals both provisions.

Unfortunately, these provisions were included in the budget last session rather than going through the usual legislative process. Doing so would have allowed for the appropriate public hearings about the pros and cons of creating this new musky season.

Not all Wisconsin waters follow the same fishing season dates for a specific species of fish. These seasons are created based on the fish spawning patterns in different parts of the state. For some species of fish, the state has been divided up into zones, and the season is determined by what zone the lake, stream and river is located in.

The Northern Zone for musky fishing includes inland waters north of U.S. Highway 10 (excluding Wisconsin - Michigan boundary waters)—essentially the top third of our state.

Before the state budget was signed into law, the "hook and line harvest" for muskies began on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend.

But the new law adds a catch and release season that runs from the first day of the general fishing season (first Saturday in May) and ends on the day before the regular harvest begins. Directing fishing pressure towards muskies this early could have a negative impact on their spawning, which could lower populations.

Decisions concerning our natural resources need to be based on science and professional fish management, not politics.

Repealing this new season will help avoid causing any harm to our fish populations. Properly managing our fish populations will also protect the tourism economies of our northern communities.